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Ohio State Engineer

Title: The Engineer's Bookshelf

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Issue Date: 1941-12

Publisher: Ohio State University, College of Engineering

Citation: Ohio State Engineer, vol. 25, no. 2 (December, 1941), 8-9.

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35805>

The Engineer's Bookshelf

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The Bookshelf this month is written by two able students in my English 413 class. Both are freshmen and both have chosen books that are extremely readable for their reviews. I believe that "Shelter", by Miss Nicholson, is the finest novel to come out of the war so far, and Mr. Sparks made a happy choice when he selected it for review. It is startlingly revealing as its single-threaded plot moves to an inevitable close. We do not know who the author is; to us she is merely Miss Nicholson. Yet, I wager, if the truth were known, she has published books before this one. Undoubtedly she knows more than a little about the technique of novel construction.

Mr. Donnelley's review of the Saroyan book, "My Name Is Aram", is quite as good as the book itself. Mr. Saroyan is a charming writer and he is better known for his prize-winning play, "The Time of Your Life", than he is for any other piece of his works.

The Bookshelf Editor stamps approval on the reviews of the two books here mentioned, as well as on the books themselves.

SHELTER

Shelter, by Janet Nicholson, Viking Press, \$2.50. Reviewed by Richard Sparks.

"Shelter!" Who could desire much more, living in the war-torn London that now exists? Who would realize the need for "shelter" more than these Londoners? It was while living in one of them that Janet Nicholson wrote the novel recently published, in which she presents a truly vivid setting of West London, and the action that resulted from a sky-full of Nazi Hell-Raisers. With this as the morbid background, the story is set; it is centered around one of those inevitable "eternal triangles."

As the most important character, let us choose Louise. She is an interesting person. By trade, she is a novelist. She has emotions; most people have emotions, but hers are only those of Louise. She hates this turmoil of war and everything that goes with it. Louise loves Jos, which, after all, is only right; he is her husband. An up-and-coming advertising man, Jos is exceedingly conventional in many of his moral ideas. Nevertheless, Jos has Louise, and also Camma, his mistress. Camma is a bit ill-at-ease over the extreme kindness she receives from Louise, just because she is Jos' mistress. Jos, however, takes this all as an advantage, and at times, becomes just a bit carefree. And thus we have the triangle that continues throughout the story.

Now let us get a glimpse of the true situation existing in London. To quote Miss Nicholson: "It was a real Summer—that August 1940, the sort of thing that takes England by surprise, and the English a bit off balance. It was Andalusia in May, it was Paris in June, it was West Indian Summer, and a touch of Florida, all rolled into one."

By this time, after the war had gotten well under way, Londoners were so accustomed to hearing sirens and dashing madly for the nearest sign reading "Air Raid Shelter," that little extra regard was given the matter, at first. The conditions in the bomb-basements varied with each individual shelter. Some were neat, some were not. A few had even become organized clubs, and had a bit more sociable atmosphere about them. Many of the shelters were only spacious enough to hold half as many people comfortably as they were now holding, uncomfortably. Yet it could not be denied that they were better than ground residences during this Nazi bombing. Occasionally a brave soul or three would venture out before the all-clear had sounded. A few would return; a few more would not.

One can not give Miss Nicholson too much credit for a picturesque description of the new, bomb-drenched London, as it now existed. To have her describe in a short paragraph, the actual scene within a small area, before and immediately after a bombing, is a bit horrifying, but real. The reader will observe the interesting arrangement and titles of chapters in the play. For example, one part would read "West End Newsreel—3, Second Week in September." He will also note in "West End Newsreel—7," that twenty-two lines have been censored by the British press before the manuscript left England.

Examples of other parts of the story:

"Two women stand against a rope that, guarded by an A. R. P. warden, cuts off the bottom of Bond Street; a few yards up a demolition squad is working, a deep crater and a burnt-out shell of facade call for no commentary beyond that of one of the lookers-on, who observes to her companion, 'My job's gone west,' and, after a few minutes of phlegmatic contemplation, trudges off to see what the Labour Exchange means to do about it.

"Piccadilly, calm, broad, empty, filled with its early morning shadow. A few people loitering aimlessly, their eyes mutely questioning each passer-by. Two

wardens and a policeman talking in the middle of the road. Everywhere the noise of glass being swept. A dog came along with red dripping from its paw.

"Bricks and mortar are not the only things the Blitz has destroyed; we have lost our sense of time. You no longer do things when you will, but when you can. You look across barricades of rope at long sections of West End thoroughfare down which there is no traffic. You appreciate for the first time the breadth and architecture of streets that have meant nothing before but a traffic jam.

"We automatically duck when something screams or thuds. With the macabre humor of their kind, errand boys have perfected a lifelike imitation of the whine of an H.E. This keeps them happy for hours, and reduces their popularity with the general public.

"We of St. James's watch and listen and feel and smell the scenes of our dramas and our delights crumbling to ash. The Palace from whose windows a few privileged ones have heard the proclamation of new kings; the Square where we have listened to the band and eaten strawberries and cream at someone's garden party; the heart-soothing beauty of Georgian architecture, the church overlooking us, and flanked by its beautiful little square rectory with its front on Piccadilly."

Not a great deal is known about the author, except that she was, during the blitz, in London. The manuscript came to the United States by Clipper with the British censorship indicated in the print. My next suggestion is that you read Janet Nicholson's "Shelter".

MY NAME IS ARAM

My Name is Aram, by William Saroyan. By Harcourt Brace. \$2.00. Reviewed by Gail Donnalley.

This is a delightful tale of a young American-born Armenian, living near Fresno, California. The story is told in an unusual style that makes easy and interesting reading.

It is the story of Aram, a member of the Garoghlanian family. Aram's family is noted for its honesty. None of the family would think of stealing anything. Of course, cousin Mourad thinks nothing of "borrowing" a horse for six months. This isn't stealing because he loves horses, and besides, doesn't he have a way with them?

The Garoghlanian family seems full of strange characters. Consider Uncle Jorgi, whom Aram accompanied to Hanford as a punishment for imitating Uncle Sergi. Jorgi was sent to help harvest watermelons because the grandfather grew tired of hearing Jorgi singing and playing on his zither. How-

ever, when Aram and Jorgi arrived at Hanford, the watermelon harvest was over and there was no work for Jorgi. Did these two return home, then? Definitely, no! They rented a house and for a month, Jorgi sang and played his beloved zither while Aram cooked.

The story of the fifty-yard dash is one which will positively delight every reader. Aram carries on a correspondence with Lionel Strongfort, "The Strongest Man In The World". Lionel is trying to sell Aram a course in physical culture, but Aram is unable to raise the necessary cash. Finally, two things happen which enable Aram to take the course. Mr. Strongfort lowers his price to three dollars for the complete course, and one of Aram's many uncles advances him the cash. Aram rigidly follows the training prescribed in the course for five days, but finally he decides that his normal life is less arduous, and he reverts to normalcy. Then the all important day of the school track-meet arrives. Aram is determined to win every event. The fifty-yard dash is first on the program. Aram enters this event. The race starts. Aram puts his head down and runs "faster than any human ever ran before." He is fairly flying over the ground. When he finally looks up, what does he behold? Every one else is ahead of him. Undaunted, Aram sets out to overtake the rest of the pack. However, the finish line finds Aram fifth in a field of five. This strange turn of events occurs with monotonous regularity in every race in which Aram has entered. Aram never once, however, loses faith in himself. This seems to be Aram's most favorable trait, for not once in the story does he lose faith in himself.

Saroyan paints a pleasant picture of the "stoppings" given him by his principal, particularly of the one following the escapade at the circus. He makes it seem so pleasant that I honestly wished I could have accompanied him, both to the circus, and after to the office of the principal for his punishment.

The best part of this delightful tale appears in the final chapter. Aram is leaving for New York City to make his fortune. At a stop-over, he is accosted by a Mormon, who makes an attempt to "save" him. The Mormon tells Aram his secret, which is simply believing in everything about him. Aram tells him he believes in order to rid himself of the Mormon. Later, he actually finds the secret to be true.

"My Name Is Aram" is for the most part simple entertainment, but there are parts of the story where Saroyan goes philosophical with good effect. I would recommend it both to those interested solely in entertainment and to those who want a little philosophy mixed with their entertainment.